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MAGNA EST VERITAS ET PREVALEBIT.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

Mr. Editor—Since my last, the 63d number of the North American Review, for April 18-9, has appeared; wherein there is a disquisition relating to historical evidence, that will form a sequel to my preceding observations so appropriate, that long as it is, I must request the favor of you to make from it the following extract, which I am sure your readers will not blame you for inserting, although it will occupy several pages of your "Correspondent." Wishing my own series of papers to be a brief and condensed summary of objections, constituting a whole in itself, I hope you will oblige me by adding this extract to my preliminary remarks; especially as it is manifestly the production of an able but very disingenuous Christian. I say disingenuous because he commenced by calling Gibbon the historian a disingenuous writer. I challenge the author of that Review, to shew me an instance of disingenuous reasoning in Gibbon's sixteenth chapter: or of disingenuous quotation. I am satisfied the writer in question is competent to the discussion, and he has no doubt the advantage of the library at Harvard College: let him use it. I tell him he cannot prove his assertion. Gibbon was not a hired and paid advocate of one side of a public question: the author of that Review probably is. Gibbon did not shape his course according to the road pointed out by popular prejudice; he dared to run counter to it. The reviewer in the North American, has the advantage of popular prejudice, and popular bigotry, and all fashionable opinion in his favor. He swims with the stream. Let him shew Gibbon's disingenuity *if he can*. I know he cannot. No honest man, who is not bribed to defend imposture, can be otherwise actuated, than by a spirit of hostility to the Christian Religion. I am so for no other reason but because I believe its proper appellation to be, the Chrisitan imposture. The following is the extract:—

If the reader has followed us in the somewhat desultory course of our observations, he will be disposed to accord with us in the conclusion of the superior eloquence of the ancients; their superiority, that is, not in the natural power itself, but in the more advantageous use of that power. This general inference will include the particular one, that in the mere beauties of composition, the rhetoric of history, the ancient historians, as a body, surpassed the moderns. It is no derogation from the exalted desert of so many admirable writers in all the living languages of Europe to confess this; for, as we shall presently see, if to the venerable names of Greek and Roman story be awarded the palm of excellence in style, their successors may assert the better and wi-

ser merit, of superiority in the inductive elements of history, of being more exact, more finished, more useful. The taste so prevalent among the ancient historians, of placing fictitious speeches in the mouths of prominent persons in their history, speeches conceived and composed by the historian himself—a practice judiciously relinquished by nearly all modern historians of eminence—illustrates the difference in spirit between the respective writers. Botta has greatly erred, we conceive, in attempting to revive this obsolete usage, founded altogether upon the rhetorical aim and taste of antiquity in the composition of history, in contrast with the devotion to truth and simplicity, which is demanded by a more enlightened judgment.

For nothing is plainer than the principle, that the value of history depends upon its certainty, that is, not only its conformity to truth in the narration of individual facts, but its general accuracy, fidelity, and fulness. It is this which should essentially characterize history; since the charms of eloquence are equally fascinating when embodied in mere works of fiction. Absolute certainty, to be sure, is incompatible with human affairs. ‘*Dubitare cogor*,’ says Tacitus, ‘*tato et sorte nas cendi*.’ History, therefore, although its end should be faithfully to mark the frailties, and celebrate the virtues of humanity, yet, like its object, is necessarily subject to imperfections. Too often has it betrayed the confidence of the great and good, who had leaned upon it, as the advocate of their worth and the pledge of their glory; as the means of securing to their names, when dead, that justice from posterity, which the petty passions of their contemporaries had denied to their character when living. For it has obscured their worth and intercepted their glory, by the extravagance or faintness of its eulogium; by total silence or the faultiness of its details; and by the undue elevation of the merit of their compe itors and opponents. But few, of the multitudes who assume the name of histories, resemble the abstract idea of historical perfection. The attainment of this lofty distinction, like the acquisition of the “*spolia opima*” at Rome, is the rare event in a long series of anxious efforts. But none, we think, can deny, that the standard of excellence, in this department of writing, has been considerably raised in modern times, without any diminution of the proportion of those who have reached it. This we shall perceive by considering those attributes of history, which the moderns have either improved or newly created; to understand which, let us briefly premise a summary of the critical principles, which apply to the subject.

The principal fountains of history are tradition and contemporary relations. Tradition relates to accounts handed down orally from generation to generation, their origin being generally clouded in the remoteness of time, and their credibility established by no contemporary writings. It is essential to the plausibility of traditions that they contradict no other tradition which is equally plausible; that they appear to be as old as the events which they commemorate; that they appear to have been believed, as long as known; that they be inconsistent with no existing public institution; and that they coincide with all the better authenticated kinds of historical evidence. Traditions should not only be strengthened by these favorable presumptions, but they should be refined from every imputation of prejudice, interest, and misrepresentation. It is essential to the general credibility of contemporary memoirs, that an unbroken series of proofs be adducible to show that they are genuine and free from adulteration; that the facts therein related agree with all other equally credible histories; and that the opinion of contemporary and subsequent writers bear witness to the fidelity, accuracy, and means of information of the author of the documents. These are the canons, by which to judge of the credibility of history properly so called. But the express relation of an event may be corroborated by constructive and subsidiary evidence. Such are monuments, medals, and inscriptions, which are so frequently made use of to illustrate obscure points in Roman history; such are the “*quipos*” or knotted cords of the Peruvians, and the pictorial records of the Mexicans; such are the ruins, or any other equally certain traces of an ancient city; and such is any public institution, whose origin can be explained only by the particular tradition or writing under consideration. Examples of all these things, and of their utility in supporting or disproving accounts, which rest more immediately in human testimony, will readily occur to the learned reader.

In short, the whole matter is a question of evidence, to be tried by the same rules, which are of every day’s application in courts of justice, and which, more than any other portion of jurisprudence, are remarkable for being founded upon plain common sense, and fortified by the inductions of the soundest practical philosophy. Is the evidence adduced of the highest kind, or is it of an inferior class? Is the witness of such standing and character that his veracity cannot be suspected, nor his intelligence im-

peached? Had he sufficient means of ascertaining the facts, which he undertakes to relate? Does he stand contradicted by any other witness; and if so, which of the two is the more credible, and gives the more plausible account of the affair? Is the fact related likely in itself, or is it intrinsically impossible, incredible, or improbable? Is the testimony of the witness corroborated by any circumstantial evidence, which, to borrow the language of the bar, cannot, like man, forget, misrecollect, or wilfully falsify? All these are pertinent inquiries, and according as a history sustains the application of such tests, are we to judge of its certainty and real value.

Much of our historical knowledge, it must be confessed, depends upon evidence which is of a secondary kind, and therefore, of necessity, less sure. This uncertainty is wrought into the very texture and fabric of all our knowledge of complicated facts; because it does not always happen that we have the best evidence of them; and even the most positively attested relations must be imperfect without the comparison of different statements, some of which must result in hearsay, and therefore partake of the defective nature of mere traditional information. Very few events have been recorded, in all their causes, progress, bearings, and effects, by one who was himself the eye-witness of them, through each of these predicaments. Suppose him to be the most credible and intelligent witness that ever testified on earth, yet his narrative must depart more or less from certainty, either by omitting material particulars of which he was ignorant, or by trusting to the information of others, of whose credibility we may be less fully assured. A history then, will be more or less valuable, in proportion as its proofs consist more or less of that evidence, which is of the highest and best character. Now these considerations being premised, we say, that modern history resting upon evidence incomparably better than ancient, it therefore deserves the praise of superior certainty and utility. In entering into the details of this proposition, we shall first examine the relative purity of the sources of ancient and modern history; and next inquire if modern historians have not more judiciously employed their advantages.

In all ancient histories, a very striking circumstance is the frequent reliance upon traditions, which relate to events that happened long before the traditions were committed to any authentic record for preservation. Tradition, after all, is little better than common rumor—fame—

‘*Tu ficti pravique tenex, quam nuntia veri;*’

and is never admissible but in the absence of less authentic evidence. Even the most credible traditions, those which are connected with a particular monument, and which do not contradict any written document, frequently have an equivocal authority. From the multitude of such cases, a few instructive examples may be selected. Thus the fable of Attius Navius, who is said to have performed a miraculous feat by cutting a whetstone through with a razor in the reign of Tarquinius Priscus, is attested by the existence of the identical razor and whetstone in the latter days of the republic.* In a battle fought by the dictator A. Postumius against the Latins, the twin gods Castor and Pollux were believed to have fought on the side of the Romans; in evidence of which a temple was erected to commemorate the legend, and the horse of Castor left the track of his hoof imprinted upon the surface of a siliceous rock near lake Regillus.† An altar was erected to *Ajus Loquens*, a god made for the occasion, being a mysterious voice which warned the Romans against the approaching capture of the city by the Gauls.‡ Tacitus relates that a “*Ficus Ruminalis*,” reputed to be the very tree under which Romulus and Remus were suckled, existed in the Comitium more than eight hundred and forty years afterwards, to attest the fact to those who were credulous enough to believe it.§ Greek examples without number to the same effect might be cited; but we content ourselves with Roman ones, because the books in which they are found are more familiar to readers in general, and to ourselves in particular. The curious student may see a specimen of them in the “*Memoires de l’Academie des Inscriptions*” (tom vi), a collection of pieces, which, out of France, is not prized so highly as it deserves to be.

These traditions do sometimes, it is true, corroborate some credible fact, as the battle and the invasion in the second and third of the above instances; but, as in the first and fourth, they are as often attached to fables; and of the whole we may say with Tully, ‘*Nihil debet esse in philosophia commentitiis fabellis loci.*’ And we learn from

* Cic. de Divin. lib. i, c. 17; Liv. lib. i, c. 36.

† Cic. de Nat. Deor. lib. ii, c. 2. comp. lib. iii, c. 5.

‡ Cic. de Divin. lib. i, c. 44; Liv. lib. v, c. 22, 50; Plutarch. Camillus.

§ Annal. lib. xiii. c. 58.

them how easy it is for numerous interests, such as the purposes of superstition, national vanity, and even the trifling passions of individuals, to give rise to traditions which only serve to perpetuate falsehood. This it is, which has conferred dignity, and even divinity, upon the origin of empires. 'Datur hæc venia antiquitati, ut, miscendo humana divinis, primordia urbium augustiora faciat.' This it is, which has poured such a blaze of holiness around all that is obscure, all that is suspicious, in the remoteness of antiquity. Scarce was there a single ancient nation, but could point you to a deity for its founder. Nay, lying tradition traces the origin of Romans, English, French, Turks, and Germans, each by separate derivations, down from the all-prolific Trojans.

Reliance upon tradition, secondary evidence, and other imperfect proofs, is too common throughout all ancient history. But the fault assumes its most obnoxious form in the early Greek accounts of foreign nations. They seem to be a sort of triumph to fraud and credulity. At that day, the examination of a foreign land was no inconsiderable enterprise; and immediate reputation was the consequence to the intelligent traveller, who safely returned from his wanderings. It was thus that the fairest flowers were gathered by Herodotus and Xenophon, by Pythagoras, Democritus, and Plato, to adorn the works they severally published.* Sometimes the inspection of original annals, but more frequently the conversation of Egyptian priests, or Persian magi, or some other equally unsafe authority, was the only source of the stranger's historical information. 'The Greeks,' said the most perfect of ancient historians, 'admire only their own perfections; "sua tantum mirantur."†' Still they had an ardent, an enterprising curiosity; but it was too often a morbid appetite for novelties, indulged without sufficient discrimination as to the objects of pursuit, or the means of gratification. Oftentimes they seemed to inquire, not to judge, but to believe. At any rate, their foreign histories abound with errors and legendary falsehoods. Hence arise the mistakes contained in the classical accounts of the Jews in Tacitus‡ and Justin,§ who doubtless copied the Greek historians. Hence the clashing and confusion of the traditions with regard to the Persians in the 'Persæ' of Æschylus, in Herodotus, Ctesias, and Xenophon.|| And if we may credit so competent a judge as Strabo, the loquacious Greeks were not to be trusted in their accounts of other foreign countries,¶ which Lucian has so keenly satirized in his 'True History.' Indeed, their uncertainty is very generally admitted by the critics; and the attempt to reconcile them has engaged and baffled the most persevering industry, and the most enlightened genius.** So imperfect and erroneous was the knowledge of the Greeks concerning the Barbarians, that is, every people but themselves, during the golden age of their literature and until after the conquests of Alexander.

The same fault, of neglecting to pay proper attention to the evidence of alleged facts, vitiates the domestic history of Greece. Without going into a minute analysis of this proposition, which would occupy too much space and time, let us believe some of the most learned and irrefragable among the ancients themselves. Strabo, in the place already cited, testifies to the fact; and Thucydides, who set the example of a better proceeding, even apologizes for not being a fabulist.† The history, as well as the philosophy, of Greece, previous to the reign of Cyrus, was identified with works of imagination.‡ The historians who succeeded from Cadmus the Milesian to Herodotus, if we may rely on the universal belief of the ancients, with the blood of the poets of the age before them, inherited also the license of poetic fancy.§§ The historical memoirs of that period were perplexed, interrupted, and often equivocal; and writers supplied by fables or conjecture, the numerous deficiencies, which essentially belong to all traditional relations. Partly from this suspicious character of preceding historians, though more indeed from his own admirable eloquence, Herodotus was esteemed the father of history. His work we may therefore consider a favorable specimen of what the Greeks effected in history, previous to the publication of Thucydides. In all facts, which came under personal observation, his veracity is unquestioned; but elsewhere the absence of original documents, in depriving him of the only proper source

* Cic. de Fin. lib. v, c. 29. † Tac. Annal. lib. ii, ap. fin.

‡ Hist. lib. v. § Lib. xxxvi.

|| Joseph. cont. Apion. lib. i, c. 12; Hutch. Dissert. ad Cyropæd. lib. i, c. 3.

¶ Lib. xi, p. 774.

** See Newton's Chronol. Intr.

†† Lib. i, c. 20; comp. Lucian. de Hist. c. 42.

‡‡ Plin. Maj. lib. vii. c. 57. §§ Quinctil. lib. ii, c. 4.

of history, has exposed him to the reproach of succeeding writers. But for this, Cicero would not have hazarded the expression, that the works of Herodotus and Theopompus contain innumerable fables; 'innumerabiles fabulæ;*' nor would Juvenal have made the remark so often quoted,

'Creditor olim
Velificatus Athos,† et quicquid Græcia mendax
Audet in historia.'

It was not until the most vigorous age of Grecian genius, that, in the hands of Thucydides and Xenophon, the contemporary domestic history exhibited any pretensions to judgment, research, and, by consequence, certainty.‡

As to the Romans, most of their knowledge of foreign nations, previous to the last days of the republic, was derived from the Greeks. 'Abest enim historia litteris nostris,' says Tully. Their first domestic historian, Fabius Pictor, flourished more than five hundred years after the supposed era of the building of Rome, and much of the earlier history of the city is involved in doubt and obscurity. Even if this were not the express admission of Livy and other equally competent critics, yet the contradictory statements of the most important events, the perplexed and broken series of their chronology, and the many relations in their histories, which are confessedly fabulous and legendary, would remove all hope of certainty in the early Roman historians. The attention of scholars has been recently drawn to this point by the writings of Niebuhr and Wachsmuth; but the same things were discussed many years ago, in some valuable dissertations, by MM. Sallier and Pouilly in the French "Memoires" (tom. vi.) The essays of the latter, especially, are sensible, clear, and direct; his arguments are convincing, and his illustrations numerous, and pregnant with conclusions. It is not our purpose to consider the subject at length; but a cursory view of it is too pertinent to be passed over entirely.

It is admitted that, except treaties and laws, resolutions of the senate or votes of the people, and insulated inscriptions, all engraved upon public monuments or tables of brass or stone,§ the early Roman history, if preserved at all, must have been preserved in the records called "annales maximi" or "commentarii pontificum." These consisted, according to Cicero, of public annals, composed yearly by the "pontifex maximus," from the foundation of the city ("ab initio rerum Romanarum") down to the time of P. Mucius, in which the memory of important events was preserved for the information of posterity.|| Now there is no doubt that such a record was, for a certain period, carefully compiled in Rome; but was it commenced at so early a period, and if so, how long did the genuine record exist? We reply, first, it is wholly incredible that it went back so far, because in those ancient times, when laws and treaties were preserved only upon tables of brass and stone, there could not be either the disposition or the means to write such a circumstantial account of events as Livy, Plutarch, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus give us; and secondly, if there was such a record, it perished long before any history was composed from the materials it furnished. Cicero, twice in his works, refers to the ancient "annales maximi" as existing in his time.¶ In one of these passages he says, nothing can be more delightful to peruse; a text which has greatly puzzled the commentators; for the words, 'Nihil potest esse jucundius,' are plainly written in all the manuscripts; and the critics appear to be agreed that Tully could not mean what he said; and therefore some are for substituting the word 'jejunius'; and others for slyly inserting a negative particle, so as to read 'injucundius.'** Their industry, we think, could well have been spared on this occasion. They forgot the taste of Cicero for antiquities, and his pride in the historical greatness of his country. For if the books of which he spoke contained a pretended record of the early history of Rome, as we find it in Livy, we can readily conceive that he took

* Cic. de Legg. lib. i. c. 1.

† See Herod. lib. vii.

‡ A. Gellius lib. iii. c. 10; Plutarch. ed. Bipont. Tom. ix. p. 393; Joseph. cont. Ap. lib. i. c. 2.

§ Liv. lib. vi. c. 1; Sueton. Vespasian. c. 8; Polybius, p. 181, B. ed. Paris.; Tac. Annal. lib. iv. c. 43.

|| De Orat. lib. ii. c. 12.

¶ Ubi supra, et de Legg. lib. i. c. 2.

** Ernesti says, 'Quomodo jucundi illi annales, ita tenuiter scripti? Sed omnes libri in illo verbo consentiunt, quod varie tentatum est a viris doctis. Mihi placent, qui injucundius legunt.' See also G. J. Vossius de Hist. Let. lib. i. c. 1. 10; Taylor's Civil Law, p. 79; Ovid. Trist. ii. 219.

pleasure in reading it; for it is throughout, every body must admit, as entertaining as a romance, and probably as veracious too.

The truth is, Plutarch expressly says that a work of that name existed, but pronounces it to be a forgery.* And how could it be otherwise? Clodius Albinus as cited by Plutarch,† Livy,‡ and Plutarch himself,§ all declare that the genuine old "annales maximi" were burnt by the Gauls when they sacked the city. And various circumstances confirm this account. For instance, the "annales maximi" contained, as we learn from Dionysius,|| what no Roman ever believed; as that Romulus was the son of Æneas; that Remus built four cities, Rome, Anchisa, Capua, and Ænea; and the exploded fables of Hercules, and the kings of Alba, which Livy also declares to be false.¶ Again, neither the chronology of Rome, nor the consular "fasti" are settled, even to a probability; as Livy** and Cicero†† both state in express terms; which could not be, if the "annales maximi" existed. The most important events in ancient Roman history are uncertain, and many of them are what Taylor calls 'ambulatory stories,' that is, facts told of several cities, and in the present case evidently copied from Greek histories. Finally, the first native historian of Rome, Fabius Pictor, instead of recurring to the "annales maximi," which he undoubtedly would have done if the book existed, professedly copied Diocles Peparethius, a foreigner and a Greek.‡‡ These proofs, which might easily be extended, corroborate the statement of Clodius Albinus, if it stood in need of any other support than the opinions of Plutarch and Livy,

Such is the state of the cause, with respect to the early history of Rome. And the sources of information of many subsequent historians were fallacious and insufficient. Prominent among them were the "libri lintei," and the "laudationes mortuorum." But the imperfection of his materials extorts frequent complaints from Livy. And Cicero says, the "laudationes" introduced much falsity into the Roman history; because they described false triumphs, fictitious consulates, and genealogies fabricated to gratify family pride.§ But the leisure consequent on the third Punic war, together with the cultivation of Grecian arts and letters, increased the number and added to the value of Roman historians. From this period, the annals of the republic are probable and coherent; but it was not until long afterwards, that history was successfully cultivated by the citizens of Rome. For the sources of history, the writer then had, in addition to private memoirs and the materials before mentioned, the acts and public despatches of generals and magistrates,|||| and the records of the senate.¶¶

It thus appears how slowly, both in Greece and Rome, but especially in the latter, history assumed even the semblance of veracity. But the sources of knowledge increase, both in extent and purity, as literature approaches to perfection; and perhaps, therefore, the materials of ancient history, in the most experienced ages of modern learning, were capable of producing the highest degree of moral certainty. That this is not the fact; that the utmost perfection to which ancient history could possibly attain, is far short of modern accuracy, will best appear by reference to some of those positive advantages, which are peculiar to modern times.

Foremost in the list, stands the art of printing, that wonderful invention, whose influence over the whole range of human affairs almost defies measurement or estimation. By means of this, the indigence of the ancients in materials is converted into the most exuberant plenteousness. By multiplying and diffusing the evidence of events, it has removed the most penetrating defect of ancient history. The knowledge of what is passing around us, or of what has taken place, is not confined to the erudition of the few; nor does it live only in the broken, impure, and perplexed rumors of the multitude. Histories and original memoirs of every degree of merit and pretension, from the splendid quarto to the modest duodecimo; public records, in such voluminous abundance in every country, that the industry of a life would not exhaust their contents; parliamentary debates and executive documents, printed in such profusion that we are more likely to sink under the weight of our riches, than suffer from their deficiency; periodical works, annual, quarterly, monthly weekly and daily, whose end is 'to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time its form and pressure,'—such are the sources of historical knowledge, which

* Numa. † Numa. ‡ Lib. vi, c. 1. § Fortun. Rom. sub fin.

|| Lib. i, c. 73. ¶ Præf.

** Lib. iA, c. 23, et alibi.

†† Brutus, c. 18.

‡‡ Plutarch. Romulus.

§§ Brutus, c. 16.

|||| Cic. Epist. lib. xii, 23; lib. xv, 1, 2, 4, &c.

¶¶ Tac. Annal. lib. xv. c. 74.

exist in modern times, and which, by means of the press are multiplied to an indefinite extent and beyond the possibility of destruction. How striking is the contrast in ancient times, as to which, no small portion of the most important facts are necessarily believed on the personal credit of a single historian, unsupported by monuments, unaided by any subsidiary evidence.* It needs no laboured discussion to show that this single advantage, the possession of the press, settles at once the question of the relative certainty of ancient and modern historians, so far as regards the materials and sources of history.

Nor is there any more doubt concerning the second branch of our inquiry, namely, whether we have not employed our advantages to greater profit than the ancients did theirs. Indeed superior critical skill would be the necessary consequence of the general diffusion of knowledge, which the invention of printing has produced. It has infused life, health, and vigor into the whole system of literature and science. Not only, therefore, are more original memoirs preserved from dispersion and loss in the libraries of the rich and of public bodies, but the literary ambition of the whole world is awakened and sustained by the facility of acquiring knowledge. Hence arises the authority, the efficiency, if not the being of sound public opinion, that sublime power, which corrects error, subdues presumption, cherishes genius, and consecrates truth, marking for infamy or glory every thought and action of life, which comes within the sphere of its operation. The utility of this power being measured by the diffusion of learning, its beneficial influence must evidently be greater upon modern, than it could ever have been upon ancient history.

Besides, in our day, the influence of public opinion is not only apparent in the bosom of a single nation, but the false judgments of any one people are modified and corrected by the criticisms of other nations. It is obvious that this circumstance is peculiarly conducive to the certainty of history, by making the partialities of each community the corrective of those around it. The public sentiment of a single people may easily be vitiated; but their prejudices will not be likely to extend through other states, whose interests are distinct, whose taste is peculiar, and whose national partialities are watchful and alert. Truth alone can endure the keen scrutiny, to which all historical writings are now subjected. The separate states of modern Europe and America constitute a vast community of nations, whose peculiarities act and react upon them as nations, precisely in the same way, followed by similar beneficial results, as single individuals improve each other, by contact and intercourse in society.

Something analogous to this, it is true, might be imagined to exist in the Greek republics; and in the Roman empire, after it had come to embrace so many distinct nations. But the case was widely different from what it is now. Lacedæmon was jealous of Athens; and Thebes of both; and Asia Minor and the Islands had interests apart from each of them; but still the feeling and character of the inhabitants of all these various regions were Greek, their taste was Greek, their spirit and philosophy were Greek. The influence which one city exerted over the peculiarities of another was greatly circumscribed and limited by this consideration, of their community of language and general national character. Their case more nearly resembles that of the Italian republics of the middle age, or of the several states in our confederacy, or of the Spanish American republics of the south, than it does that of the great family of nations of the European race. And the overwhelming influence of the city of Rome, towards which all the ambition of the various nations that composed the empire centred and converged, and by which all their tastes were controlled, modified the operation of the power of which we are speaking, upon the literature of the later Romans. Every thing is now radically changed. We have ceased to think that there is but one blessed region wherein genius is vernacular and patrimonial, and in whose embellishment nature exhausted all the might and fertility of her invention. There is no longer a people, who can claim, with Rome, the insolent prerogative of universal empire; or with Athens, the exclusive heritage of taste, of

* We are here reminded of the quaint lamentation of Lipsius, on occasion of the fine character of Helvidius Priscus given by Tacitus. 'At tam illustre sidus (heu quid speremus?) in tenebris pene jacebat, absque una hac Taciti face.' (Tac. Hist. lib. iv, c. 5, in notis.) The idea of discovering a brilliant star by means of torch-light is quite new and clever.

genius, or of elegance. The division of the literary world into distinct languages and communities is attended with this useful effect; and each nation has learned to prize its own excellence, without despising or neglecting whatever is learned or ingenious elsewhere. History derives from this comprehensive and enlightened curiosity, this enlarged literary tolerance, a certainty, variety, and copiousness, which were hardly known to the ancients even in speculation.

Apprehensive lest we may prove tedious, we shall confine ourselves to remarking upon but one topic more, under this head. The value of modern history is enhanced we conceive by the greater research, which is the consequence of greater scientific attainments. Science may repress the spirit and exuberance of fancy; but it will, at the same time, compensate for this inconvenience by the bestowment of still greater benefits, having peculiar influence upon the certainty of history. By means of experience, we are disciplined to habits of circumspection, of hesitancy, shall we say of distrust? Every day which adds to our knowledge and judgment, diminishes our credulity, and our tendency to rely upon imperfect proofs; since it teaches us a delicate, timorous, and laborious estimate of the grounds of moral evidence. It is an advantage, which the mere lapse of time, the simple circumstance of living at a particular age of the world, confers upon us. Experience instructs us in the errors of our fathers; it discloses the various passions, interests, and caprices, which may delude us into false judgments; and it also reveals the means of guarding the candor and simplicity of the understanding. Here we obviously excel the ancient historians. Not only do we examine facts with more penetrating discernment, but we also purify our opinions and conclusions from those numerous errors, the sole support of which is prejudice, and their origin credulity. There is no longer overpowering authority in names; for we learn to see error as it is, cleared from the lustre of false beauty, the factitious good thrown around it by party, by fashion, and by prescription. Whenever a work of high pretension is now published, how strict is the scrutiny to which it is subjected. Witness the universal alertness of criticism excited by the appearance of Sir Walter Scott's 'Napoleon,' which is read, studied, examined all over Europe and America, and, since Asia, Africa, and the Pacific Islands are no longer exempt from the illumination of English literature, we may add, all over the civilized world. The spirit of unsparing investigation, which characterizes modern history, is the pledge and guarantee of its greater certainty; for it exposes the interested praises or censure of the contemporary chronicler, discloses his prejudices in their naked deformity, and reveals to the world those monuments of truth, which time had overturned in his flight, and left to lie concealed under the obscure and dusty ruins of the past.

I now proceed to the testimonies of Josephus, Pliny the younger, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Longinus.

The modern *popular* books, usually referred to by the English defenders of the bible authenticity, are, the *Speciligium veterum patrum* of Dr. Grabe, the *Bibliotheca* of Fabricius, so far as that very learned man's catalogue relates to this controversy, the small work of Bp. Cosins on the canon, in quarto, the translation of Lewis Ellis Du Pins' *eccles. hist.*, the *eccles. hist.* of Tillemont, the work of Basnage on the Jews, the *Historie de Manicheism*, in two vols. fol. of the learned Beausobre, the *ecclesiastical histories* of Jortin and Mosheim, and the dissertations of the latter, with his treatise *De rebus Christianes, ante Constantinum magnum*; but principally, the prejudiced but very learned works of those able and honest divines, the Rev. Jeremiah Jones, "new and full method of settling the canonical authority of the new testament," printed at the Clarendon Press, Oxford 1798, in three vols. octavo; and the great work of Dr. Nathaniel Lardner, "On the Credibility of the Gospel History," &c. in eleven vols. octavo, 1798. The works of Dr. Priestley, and his controversy with Horsley may be consulted.

The list of spurious gospels and other forgeries of the early Christians will be found in Toland's works, Nazarenus; at page 119 of Dr. Jeremiah Jones's first volume, and republished by W. Hone, at the end of his apocryphal new testament, second edition, 1821. The publications now referred to are valuable, because they furnish accurate references to original authorities. These authorities, though I have most of them separately, are best found in the collections of Cotelierius, and in the many volumed folio, entitled *Bibliotheca veterum petrum ut et Hereticorum*, of which there are two or three editions, the maxima the best. I do not now possess that work, but I pledge myself to any adversary, to produce the original of any reference I rely on, with a specification of the edition which I actually use for the purpose, and the page where it is to be found.

The history of the Jewish transactions, and the state of the Jews from Augustus to Tiberius, are treated of by their agent and ambassador Philo Judæus: generally from the earliest times to the time of Trajan, by Josephus: their theological opinions, are to be found in the Talmudists, and the Mishna: and in the Jewish history of Joseph Ben Gorion, or Josippon.

Philo Judæus was cotemporary with the period assigned to the life of Jesus Christ, and the fair conclusion from his works is, that he was among the Jews at Jerusalem or at Rome, at the very period of the crucifixion.

Josephus was born about two years after the crucifixion.

The Mishna dates about A. D. 180. The Talmud A. D. 500. There are two or three very doubtful and obscure passages that Lardner would press into the service if he could.

Joseph Ben Gorion wrote according to Lardner, A. D. 930. So also says Basnage.

Of Christ and of the Christians, none of these Jewish accounts take any notice. Nor of the prodigies, or of the public excitation said by the evangelists to have accompanied that event. Circumstances so strange, as not easily to have been passed over by an historian, had they really happened.

Let us suppose an examination in court.

Counsel. This is John Nokes, if your honor pleases: we call him to prove the presence of Thomas Stiles in the room at the time. John Nokes, were you at the place in question, at the time stated?

John Nokes. Yes.

Counsel. Did you see Thomas Stiles there at that time?

John Nokes. Yes, I did.

Counsel. How do you know it was Thomas Stiles?

John Nokes. Because, he had on a white coat, blue silk jacket, red breeches, and green colored stockings, and I could not help remarking him.

Counsel. Do you know the person of Thomas Stiles?

John Nokes. Perfectly well.

Counsel. Who were in the room at the time?

John Nokes. Several people were there: Mr. A. B., Mr. C. D., Mr. E. F., Mr. G. H.

Counsel. Call Mr. A. B.: Mr. A. B. were you at the frolic at the time and place, John Nokes speaks of?

Mr. A. B. Yes, I was there.

Counsel. Did you see Thomas Stiles there?

Mr. A. B. No, I did not.

Counsel. You hear his dress described, did you see any body there so dressed.

Mr. A. B. No, there was nobody there dressed in that manner. I know Thomas Stiles well, I am sure if he had been there I should have seen him: especially in such a dress.

Counsel. How long did you stay in the room?

Mr. A. B. I staid there the whole time: I came there before John Nokes arrived, who came late; and I was there when John Nokes went away.

Counsel. Is it possible for Thomas Stiles to have been there, and you not see him?

Mr. A. B. No, it is not possible. I know him well: there was no person so dressed at any time whatever while he was there.

Counsel. Call Mr. C. D., and the other witnesses.

(They all depose to the same purpose, as Mr. A. B.)

Counsel. Here are four witnesses, who swear positively that Thomas Stiles was not at the place, at the time sworn to by John Nokes. They all say that he could not possibly have been there without their knowledge: that there is no room for mistake in this matter. These are men of good character, who have no interest to deceive. Under these circumstances is it possible to give credit to John Nokes, who has a manifest and strong inclination to make us believe that Thomas Stiles was there? Here are four evidences unimpeachable, who contradict John Nokes: can you believe him?

Is it possible, respectable men of high standing and character in the nation could have given an account, professedly a fair, ample and true one, of the events of the very period in question, and pass over the strange events related by these evangelists? Who Philo Judæus, and Josephus, were, we know; and we know their standing in society: who the authors of the books ascribed to the evangelists were, we know not.

I am aware, that some very obscure passages in the Mishna and the Talmud are construed as relating to Jesus Christ, but I am satisfied to refer the reader to Lardner's extracts from Lightfoot. See Lard. works vol. 7. p. 138, et seq.

But is it true that Josephus never mentions Jesus Christ?

It is true; I refer to the summary of the argument in 7 Lard. 120 et seq. which leaves not the slightest room for doubt about this passage in Josephus being an impudent and clumsy forgery. I deny that there is a clergyman now in Europe ignorant enough to defend it. Gibbon refers to the conclusive objections of Le Fevre in the edition of Josephus put forth by Havercamp; and to the masterly reply of the Abbe Longe-rue to Daubuz, in the *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne*, tom. 7, p. 237—288. The latter book I do not possess. Havercamp's edition of Josephus, in two vols. fol. 1726, is now before me. Pages 189 to 283 of the second volume, are occupied by the disquisitions at length pro

and con of various authors on the authenticity of this passage in Josephus relating to Jesus Christ; (Antiquit. Jud. book 8 ch. 3, sect. 3.) beginning with the defence of it, by Ch. Daubuz, prefaced by Grabe. The letter of Tanaquil Faber to John Chabrol (response sans replique) is found as Gibbon cites it p. 267 to 273. Blondel, Leclerc and Bp. Warburton also condemn the passage. If any man will give himself the trouble of carefully examining this controversy in Havercamp and Lardner as I have done, and can then deliberately assert that he thinks the passage genuine, I can only say I should entertain strong suspicions of their judgment or veracity. The fact is, the passage was first cited by Eusebius Hist. Ecc. lib. 2, ch. 23; that notorious and unprincipled falsifier of all history—that forger on principle and by profession—who after lying without mercy and without scruple, can say with St. Paul, if the truth of God hath more abounded by my *lie* unto his glory, why am I judged a sinner? The passage was not in the editions of Josephus known to Justin Martyr, Clemens Alexandrinus, Tertullian, or Origin. Eusebius first produced it. The passage is *his* forgery; in like manner, *he* forged the letter of Abgares of Edessa to Jesus Christ, and the answer, and he contributed by forged additions, and wilful misquotations of Tertullian to give currency to the silly fable about the Meletenian legion, whose prayers saved the army of Marcus Aurelius from dying of thirst. Yet is this Eusebius the main source of Christian ecclesiastical history for more than three centuries! Is it possible for any tyro in historical criticism to consider such a man as Eusebius, professing and practising these forgeries, authority to be relied on for any fact whatever? I had almost forgotten the forged letter of Pontius Pilate, and the proposal of Tiberius, which Justin Martyr and Eusebius endeavored to palm upon the credulous Christians. As to the passage relating to Paul of Tarsus in Longinus. Dr. Hudson first received it from L. A. Zacagni, an Italian, who said he copied it from Ms. in the Vatican. Fabricius considered it as spurious, and I know of no author who defends it. At this period of Christian forgery, the presumption is against every Christian assertion, not intrinsically credible.

Having now cleared the road from Eusebian rubbish, I may proceed to other authors.

Suetonius. The passage is as follows: vit. Claud. ch. 25. Judæus, impulsore Chresto, assidue tumultuantes, Roma expulit. Chrestus is not Christus: Judæos are not Christianos. Moreover, 18 Act 2 confirms the interpretation as being confined to the Jews and not relating to the Christians at all. Verily this is playing Procrustes with an innocent paragraph. Does it not suit your purpose? Make it suit. Is it too short, stretch it. Too long, lop it. Too wide and ample, trim it. Lardner, good man, who in every page substitutes, it seems, it is likely, we may suppose, no doubt, it is fair to conclude, it is not improbable, &c. &c. for legitimate syllogistic conclusions, swallows the passage with all its difficulties! But Christian writers have rare digestions!

PHILO VERITAS.

SATURDAY, JUNE 6, 1829.

FREE DISCUSSION.

Every one whose mind is not imbued with superstition, and who entertains a sincere desire to promote the happiness of the human race, will readily admit, that open and impartial discussion, is the foundation of human liberty. Free, unrestrained inquiry on all subjects, is, in fact, the source of knowledge and wisdom; for how can we detect error, or distinguish truth, if there is one topic remaining which we are not to investigate. We may expiate for centuries on the advantages attending correct views, and correct principles; but if those systems which brutalize the mind, which proscribe the use of reason, and which hold mankind under the dominion of a vile superstition, are not to be probed to the bottom, and exhibited in all their deformity, the most powerful eloquence, the most transcendent reasoning in the world (though of weight in their proper place) will be utterly useless. To convince a man that happiness is attainable, it is not enough that he *know* this. The *causes* which deprive him of it—the *sources* of his misery, must be clearly, and distinctly pointed out; otherwise he will remain all his life-time a child of sorrow and misfortune. Ignorant of the *nature* of the evils which beset him, he will continue the dupe of the crafty and designing, whose sole object it is to darken the understanding, that they may perpetuate their inordinate power and influence.

At no period have the efforts of these men, to prevent the promulgation of truth, been more strenuous or apparent than at present; and although those engaged in endeavoring to counteract the evils consequent on their pernicious influence, are not less active than they are, it is a undeniable fact, that the mass of the people are swallowed up in a gulf of superstition, from which they know not how to escape.

In these circumstances, the question comes home to every one professing to advocate the cause of *mental* improvement. In what way can I best, and most speedily effect the overthrow of that system, so prevalent in the world, which forms a barrier to human improvement, and human happiness? Some are apt to think, that because their own minds have been freed from error, they may sit down contentedly, and congratulate themselves on the escape they have made from the trammels of superstition. But this is a selfish, narrow-minded feeling. The individual who entertains a correct opinion of the duties of a philosopher and a philanthropist, will not persuade himself that he has fulfilled the part allotted to him, if he has neglected, for one single moment, to assail the strong holds of superstition. He will consider no sacrifice too great to overcome this formidable enemy of man.

It is true, that the efforts now making to diffuse liberal sentiments, have a tendency to render the human race more intelligent—consequently more manly, just and generous. But when we contemplate the difficulties which those have to encounter who are engaged in this pursuit—the vast numbers that swell the enemy's ranks—the enormous sums they have under their control, and that unbounded influence which serves as a bulwark to protect them from exposure—it must occur to eve-

ry one, who reflects on the subject, that something more is requisite to be done than attacking the outposts, or merely skirmishing with so powerful a foe: that, in fact, the war must be carried into the enemy's camp, if we calculate on dislodging him.

It was under this conviction that, last year, a journey to the western part of this state was undertaken by Mr. Offen. Those who have been accustomed to peruse the *Correspondent*, already know with what gratifying success that journey was attended; but few are aware that Mr. Offen who depends altogether on his personal labor for support, devoted two months of his time *gratuitously* in this service and that the *whole expense* attending it, was borne by the editor of this paper. This is not mentioned as a matter of regret, but with the view of stimulating others, who may be equally devoted to the cause, to aid in a pecuniary way, in carrying into effect similar journeys to different parts of the country; and to meet the outlays necessary for which, a subscription has been opened. By this plan, all who feel disposed, will have an opportunity of contributing according to their inclination or ability; and money for the purpose may be thus raised without inconvenience to any individual.

The friends of free discussion have a great task to perform. But they are encouraged in their endeavors to break down old established prejudices by the conviction, that the effect of their labors will be the victory of reason over superstition, and of truth over falsehood and delusion. The period of the completion of that triumph, they do not pretend to predict. But as certain as the earth moves on its axis, and that rays of light are emitted by the sun, liberal principles will eventually prevail. It behoves them, therefore, in the present state of mental debasement, to be observant—to watch the proper opportunities at which to forward their views, and to strengthen their means of annoying the common enemy.

Subscriptions for this purpose are requested to be transmitted forthwith to the editor of the *Correspondent*, as it is intended to commence operations whenever a sum is obtained large enough to warrant the proceeding.

To promote the same laudable object, Mr. Offen will, on Sunday next, the 7th inst. deliver a public lecture, in the Bowery Long Room, illustrative of "the necessity of *free discussion* on *theological* subjects, in order to emancipate the human mind from superstitious thralldom;" on which occasion a collection will be taken up towards defraying the expense of promulgating liberal principles throughout the union.

To subscribers.—Our books present such a heavy list of *arrears*, that unless our subscribers, who are defaulters, are more prompt in their payments, we shall be compelled to *discontinue* sending them our paper after the close of the present volume. When they are informed that our receipts (even although every cent were collected) amount to little more than meet the expenditure, it is hoped they will perceive the reasonableness of continuing to comply with the original terms of publication. Agents are respectfully requested to attend to this notice; and in all cases we should prefer remittances to be made directly to ourselves through the post-office.

Tracts.—We have now completed eight numbers of “*Liberal Tracts*,” of which a supply can be had from the commencement, at \$1 for a thousand pages. The tracts already printed are,

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|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| No. 1. Christian Mysteries. | No. 5. Origin of the Jews. |
| 2. Progress of Christianity. | 6. Scripture Harmony. |
| 3. Thoughts on Religion. | 7. Justice of Jehovah. |
| 4. The Fable of the Bees. | 8. History of one God. |

Tracts ordered from the country, must be taken from our depository, 76 Maiden lane, as the low price at which they are sold, will not compensate for the trouble of transmission.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A Dialogue between M. Jurieu and a Burgomaster of Rotterdam.

Continued from page 287.

Jurieu. Religion had then no connection with the civil power.

Burgomaster. Nor wanted it, nor claimed it.

Jur. The world, sir, is much altered since.

Burg. Not for the worse, I hope, having had the gospel so long in it, and after so great expense to the people for preaching it. I hope you do not find the present race of Christians more abandoned and untractable, than the first Christians found the Pagans.

Jur. Sir, I am sorry to say we have not now such extraordinary assistance as they had then, nor such plentiful effusion of the divine spirit.

Burg. Assistance of money and revenues you have had, I am sure, enough; but the assistance of the sword, and the effusion of blood, will make no amends for the want of the assistance and effusion of the peaceable spirit of God.

Jur. I am far from saying that it does: But I cannot help saying, that the power of the magistrate has had a great share in extending Christianity; and God has shewn, that he approved the zeal of the first Christian emperors, by the success which he gave them.

Burg. The persecuting Christian emperors had much such success against paganism, as Lewis XIV. has had against calvinism, and got it by the same wicked methods. Mahomet had greater success than either; and 'tis a particular article of the Mahomedan religion, that God blessed every thing that succeeds.

Jur. No such argument can be used in behalf of a false religion.

Burg. Every whit as much, as in behalf of false and barbarous measures, take to propagate the true. Every man thinks his own religion the true religion; and every religious successful mischief that every man does, has, according to your argument, the divine approbation. So that here, out of the mouth of Mr. Jurieu, is a defence of all the pious barbarities and slaughters that ever were committed in the world.

Jur. Sir, I am against all barbarities.

Burg. Yes; when they fall upon yourself or your party: but when they are exercised for you against others, they are wholesome severities. If the duke Guise hanged a Hugonot, you cry it was persecution and bar-

barity ; and so say I : but if Dr. Calvin burned Servetus, it was the just doom of a heretic ; nay, it was God's judgment upon heresy ; and just so argued the duke of Guise. Now to me both the Doctor and the duke were persecutors and barbarians in those instances : But thus sects butcher and burn one another, and practise and condemn the same thing.

Jur. Pray, sir, consider the consequences of this reasoning : you put the wolves upon the same footing with the lambs of Christ, as to the defence and security of their flocks.

Burg. Every persecutor is a wolf : did you ever see a lamb devour a kid ? did you ever know a lamb armed with fangs and claws, and nourished with blood ?

Jur. No : But I hope you, that are magistrates, ought to defend us against wolves.

Burg. Without all doubt : but do not you persuade us to mistake men for wolves, and friends for enemies ?

Jur. No : but I mention Mr. Bayle to be a wolf.

Burg. Of all men I should never take Mr. Bayle, the philosopher, for a beast of prey. Has he ever torn you, Mr. Jurieu, or threatened to eat you up ?

Jur. This is raillery, and not reasoning : sure you will allow that heretics and sceptics are wolves ?

Burg. No, indeed won't I : I have known excellent men of both sorts. I will neither allow them to be wolves, nor suffer wolves to fall upon them.

Jur. Sir, you'll pardon me ; if you argue thus, I cannot argue with you.

Burg. I believe you cannot : you thought you had nothing to do but to point out your wolf ; nor I, but to knock him on the head.

Jur. I am sorry to see so great lukewarmness ; it forebodes no good to the church.

Burg. It forebodes no victims, no spiritual bonfires to the ecclesiastics ; whose fiery zeal, were it suffered to blaze out, would soon make fuel of the whole state, and reduce this opulent commonwealth to uniformity, and a few miserable fisher-towns : but the truth is, we are not lukewarm, we act upon a principle of Christianity, by tolerating all religions, and by not suffering any Christian to hurt another, or any other man, for his religion.

Jur. Alas, sir ! without an assistance more active, religion will languish.

Burg. That is your fault then : you have our active assistance : have you not pulpits, and temples, and opportunities, by the providence of the states, which maintains great numbers of ecclesiastics, at a great expense to teach the people what the bible teaches them ; to explain to them the plain commandments of God ; to open to them the inspired writings of the gospel in your own words ; and to baffle all who find any other meaning there than what you find ?

Jur. But what if they pay no submission to our doctrine and discipline ?

Burg. No more they ought not, if they do not like your doctrine and discipline. Submission is paid to external things, and due only to the

state: What title have you to any body's submission, any more than the church of France had to yours? If every man be not to follow his own judgment in religion, then is religion blindness.

Jur. But what do you say to those who have no religion?

Burg. Say! I say, I wish they had.

Jur. What! will you take no method to reclaim them?

Burg. Yes, we give you money to talk to them.

Jur. And they won't mind us.

Burg. Then you must do as I do, pray for them.

Jur. This is a faint way of propagating the gospel?

Burg. I beg that you would name me any other.

Jur. Sir, give me leave to tell you, that three-fourths of Europe would be Pagans at this day, had not the emperor Constantine, and his successors, employed their authority to abolish Paganism.

To be continued.

PROPOGATION OF LIBERAL PRINCIPLES.

A Lecture will be delivered, to-morrow evening, at 8 o'clock in the Bowery Long Room, by Mr. Offen, "on the necessity of free discussion on *theological* subjects, in order to emancipate the human mind from superstitious thralldom," to which all the friends of liberal principles are respectfully invited to attend.

After the lecture, a collection will be taken up towards defraying the expense of promulgating liberal principles throughout the union.

Free Press Association.—Mr. Houston will deliver a lecture, in the Bowery Long Room, to-morrow afternoon, at 3 o'clock, "on the existence, power, and influence of the devil."

* * The debate is unavoidably postponed until Sunday evening, the 14th inst. in consequence of the room being occupied by the public lecture, as noticed above.

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The friends of liberal principles throughout the United States, are respectfully requested to accept of the agency of the *Correspondent*. Four volumes are now completed, and sets can be had from the commencement.

The *CORRESPONDENT* is published every Saturday, at No. 76 Maiden-lane, New-York; and by Mr. John Turner, No. 140 1-2 Market-street, Philadelphia, at THREE DOLLARS per annum, in advance. All communications to be addressed to Mr. Geo. Houston, Editor, New-York.

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